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MOVING ONWARD: TRANSNATIONALISM AND FACTORS INFLUENCING ROHINGYAS' MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH TO MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Continuous human rights persecutions have forced nearly one million Rohingyas to flee from Myanmar and seek refuge in Bangladesh. While their forced migration to the first asylum country of Bangladesh is inevitable, some have been compelled to move onward to other transit countries. Existing studies indicate various factors influencing cross-border activities among different segments of immigrants. They also suggest that the degree of transnationalism affects different kind of people on the move, subsequently brings about unique consequences to receiving community. In this study, we aim to determine factors contributing to the onward movement of Rohingyas from their refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh to Malaysia. We utilize the broader concept of transnationalism in order to gauge the Rohingyas' perception and the realities they face in relation to their onward movement from Bangladesh to Malaysia. This study employed three methods of data collection namely a survey, an in-depth interview and a focus group discussion in engaging the Rohingyas in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Resulting from a two-part of data collection conducted in 2013 and 2016, we found that the onward movement of Rohingyas was mostly driven by poverty, uncondusive livelihood experiences, limited access to humanitarian aid, and inadequate refugee protection in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, positive Rohingyas' perception toward Malaysia, coupled with the availability of job opportunities have attracted them to choose Malaysia as the next asylum country. While this study enriches the existing literatures on transnationalism and onward movement of refugees, it also provides empirical evidences for humanitarian assistances in Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Keywords: Forced migration, onward movement, refugees, Rohingya, transnationalism.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Forced migration has been inevitable due to a long history of systematic persecution and discrimination faced by the Rohingyas in the northern Arakan province of Myanmar (Alam, 1999; Ullah, 2011; Azharudin & Azlinariah, 2012; Equal Rights Trust, 2014). As of the end of 2017 alone, an estimated 605,000 Rohingyas have been forced to migrate to Bangladesh resulting from the violent crackdown that broke out in late August 2017 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017).

While their forced migration from Myanmar to Bangladesh is inevitable, the reasons for which some Rohingyas have fled their respective refugee camps as well as their makeshift settlements mainly in the Cox's Bazar district of Chittagong division in Bangladesh to other countries – including Malaysia – are relatively unknown. Available reports published by intergovernmental organizations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017; United Nations, 2017) and international organizations (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2017; Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2002) have revealed the magnitude of the humanitarian crises in many refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Nevertheless, many of these reports do not explicitly relate such humanitarian crises as the reasons for the onward movement of Rohingyas from Bangladesh to other transit countries in the region.

This study aims to identify the various factors prompting the Rohingyas to move onward from their refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh to Malaysia. Essentially, onward movement is a typical migration trajectory by which refugees and asylum seekers flee from their first asylum country to the next asylum country and/or toward their preferred destination

country. Given the advancement of communication technology (Brekke, 2008; Hamel, 2009; Dekker & Engbersen, 2012) and the rise of transnational organized crimes such as migrant smuggling that facilitate international migration (Hassan & Md. Nannu, 2014; Andika, 2018) – it is inadequate to apply a single theoretical approach in studying refugees' onward movement. For example, it is insufficient to apply a network-based approach to understand and/or explain the reasons in which some Rohingya refugees had decided to move onward from Bangladesh to Malaysia. This is because their decision to migrate may be influenced by the presence of smuggling network who continuously offers their onward movement, rather than being merely influenced by the existence of a diaspora or network in Malaysia. In addition, with the rapid expansion of globalization for the past few decades, current trend of international migration is becoming multifaceted and complex (Kurekova, 2011). The multifaceted nature of the migration phenomenon hence requires analytical and methodological tools from more than one disciplines (Massey et al., 1993; Mansoor & Bryce, 2006; Collinson, 2009).

There is a rising utility of the concept of transnationalism in researching international migration that seeks to explore and describe a new reality in the trend of migration and integration into host societies (Dunn, 2005; Kurekova, 2011). In addition, Dunn (2005) argues that transnationalism has been referred in many existing studies in a variety of domains such as activities of transnationalism; a set of complex relations; social field and context; and subjectivity. For instance, Vertovec (1999) argues that transnationalism is a complex multiple ties and interaction between people and institutions across nation states. Another example as claimed by Zirh (2005), transnationalism is not only about political dynamics and interaction but manifestation of a reality facing vulnerable segments of our society affected by many forms of cross-border movement. For the purpose of guiding this study, we utilize a broader conceptual framework of transnationalism – focuses specifically on the “activities of transnationalism”, which is discussed further in section 2.

The findings in this study are derived from a two-part of field works engaging the Rohingya refugees, activists and community leaders in Klang Valley, Malaysia, between 2013 and 2016. Klang Valley comprises two states (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor), and it is the central region of Peninsular Malaysia – where it is claimed to be the most populated area of the Rohingyas in the country (Azizah, 2015). The findings in this study are expected to complement the existing literatures on the Rohingyas' refugee protection and transnationalism. This study also aims to contribute and equip humanitarian actors in Bangladesh, providing a handful of empirical evidences to contribute in the formulation and implementation of policy

intervention and humanitarian assistance in many refugee camps and makeshift settlements in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Rohingyas

Described widely as the world's most persecuted community, the Rohingyas are an ethnic group, of whom are mainly Muslims, who have lived for centuries in the Arakan State of Myanmar. Since 1982, the Rohingyas are not considered to be one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups, which indirectly render them non-citizens (Ullah, 2011; Amnesty International, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2017). Denied the right to citizenship, while continuously facing persecution and discrimination, the Rohingyas in Myanmar have inevitably been forced to risk their lives crossing international borders in order to seek asylum in neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia (Ullah, 2011; Azharudin & Azlinariah, 2012; Equal Rights Trust, 2014; Fernandes, 2017).

Resulting from the long-standing human rights persecutions facing the Rohingyas back in the Arakan state of Myanmar, they have been granted refugee status by the UNHCR, in accordance to the United Nations' Convention Relating to the Rights of Refugees 1951 (hereinafter referred to as the 1951 Refugee Convention). The term "refugee" is referred to as a person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (United Nations, 1951).

For the past decade, there have been two major migrations involving hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas that have escaped constant human rights persecutions and killing of innocent Rohingyas by the Burmese military forces in Myanmar. Between September 2012 and April 2013, about 27,800 Rohingyas had fled their respective villages in the Arakan State of Myanmar, in search of political sanctuary in Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Secondly, as mentioned earlier, at the end of 2017, a total of 605,000 Rohingyas fled Arakan and arrived in Bangladesh stemming from the violence that broke out in late August 2017 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017).

Based on the estimates at the end of 2017, there are more than one million Rohingyas, who are currently seeking refuge in various countries such as Bangladesh (947,000 Rohingyas), Saudi Arabia (500,000), Pakistan (350,000), Malaysia (150,000), India (40,000), Thailand (5,000), and Indonesia (1,000) (The Arakan Project, 2016; Anonymous, 2017). In Bangladesh

alone, the majority of Rohingyas have settled temporarily in many refugee camps and makeshift settlements, as well as in host communities (Ullah, 2016; Inter-Sector Coordination Group, 2017). As of December 2017, there were at least 830,000 Rohingya refugees living in more than 10 different refugee camps and host communities at Cox's Bazar (Inter-Sector Coordination Group, 2017). The largest refugee camp is in Kutupalong, recording more than 400,000 Rohingya refugees. Kutupalong has been constantly expanding to accommodate the growing number of new Rohingya arrivals since August 2017. Meanwhile, another refugee camp (Thangkhali) accommodates about 29,000 Rohingya refugees during the same period. About 36 (75%) out of 48 respondents surveyed for this study have had the history of settling at Kutupalong and Thangkhali camps, before continuing their journey to Malaysia.

Earlier studies indicate that protracted refugee situations and insufficient humanitarian assistances have increased the level of frustration, depression and feeling of hopelessness among Rohingya refugees, including children and women in many refugee camps in Cox's Bazar (Coutts, 2005; Farzana, 2016; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2017; Prodip, 2017). Host population in Cox's Bazar tends to associate the presence of Rohingya refugees with the increase in crime incidences, while also accusing them of taking away job opportunities from the local population (Prodip, 2017). In addition, as pointed out by Farzana (2016), many unaccompanied Rohingya children have been forced to make a living by working as seasonal workers outside the boundaries of the refugee camps. Health problems including widespread malnutrition and reproductive health are also critical issues facing many Rohingya children and vulnerable women in Cox's Bazar (Prodip, 2017).

In Malaysia, the historical presence of the Rohingyas can be traced as early as the 1970s (Azizah, 2015). Other studies indicate that the first Rohingya arrival may be between the late 1970s and early 1980s (Suan, 2006; Irish Centre for Human Rights, 2010; Letchamanan, 2013; Wake & Cheung, 2016). Rohingyas are only found in Peninsular Malaysia, mainly in urban states such as Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Penang (Azizah, 2015). The new Rohingya arrivals tend to live a nomadic lifestyle, moving from one place to another in search of employment.

As of November 2017, a total of 65, 250 Rohingyas have been registered as refugees by UNHCR, Malaysia. This does not include an unknown number of other Rohingya asylum seekers, who have not registered as refugees during this period. As a non-State party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the existing national laws, including the Malaysian Immigration Act 1959/63 do not distinguish between undocumented immigrants and refugees (Andika, 2017). For instance, under the Immigration Act 1959/63, the Rohingyas and other refugee

populations regardless of their refugee status – are considered “undocumented migrants”, and liable to a fine amount of not exceeding RM10,000 (approximately US\$ 2,500) and/or maximum of five years of imprisonment, and up to six strokes of the cane.

2.2 Onward Movement

Onward movement is literally defined as moving from one place to another or a place forward. Most refugees and asylum seekers, be it in the European, African, or Asian regions, have a typical migration trajectory by which they flee from their country of origin, transiting at the first asylum country before continuing their journey to the next asylum country or toward their preferred destination country. While some refugees and asylum seekers are compelled to stay at the first asylum country, others opt to move onward voluntarily for a variety of reasons. This journey may be part of their wider migratory movement in search of international protection, often in an irregular manner (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2015). While the term onward movement has been widely used when writing or debating about issues of refugee movement, it has neither legal reference nor has it been explicitly stipulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international refugee laws and instruments (Garlick, 2016).

Many factors have prompted refugees and asylum seekers to move onward from the first asylum country to other countries. These include the unavailability or insufficient protection, limited access to humanitarian assistance, and the lack of long-term solutions (Garlick, 2016). Some refugees perceive that the risk in moving onward is lesser than remaining at the first asylum country. However, as pointed out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2015), onward movement by irregular means can also expose refugees and asylum seekers to a variety of risks including violence, exploitation, and violations of their rights. The UNHCR also points out that the fact that asylum seekers would usually apply for refugee status upon arriving at the first transit country and will do the same when arriving at the next transit country – it may cause inefficiency, administrative duplication and delays in humanitarian responses.

2.3 Transnationalism

There has been a dramatic increase in global population movement for the past few decades. For example, the International Organization for Migration [IOM] (2018) has recorded a total of 244 million international migrants in 2015 – an increase of 59% as compared to the total

number of global migrants recorded back in 1990. Not only the size has been on the rise, but the complexity of the types of international movement – consisting permanent and temporary, legal and irregular migration, forced and voluntary, and work and non-work related migration (Dunn, 2005; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2018).

One would argue that international movement has been in operation for a long time – or exist even in previous centuries. Nevertheless, the scale and complexity are not multifaceted as of today's migration – driven heavily by the advancement of technology in communication and transportation. Consequently, traditional themes in international migration studies such as assimilation, identity and dual citizenship, social network, diaspora, economic migration and national security – have been more thought provoking. Dunn (2005) argues that routine communication and return visitation (due to technological advancement) among international migrants to their country of origins have proven that “assimilation theory” are insufficient to understand their mobility (Dunn, 2005). For that, he suggests that transnationalism is a more relevant concept in which different forms of mobility can be addressed holistically (Dunn, 2005).

Transnationalism has been defined as the multiple ties and interactions that link people and institutions across borders of nation states (Vertovec, 1999). For Charles (1992), transnationalism is a process of networking between groups and social agents distributed across different places – where economic opportunities and collaboration within, and among different groups and social agents are facilitated. To put it in simple terms, as explained by Dunn (2005), transnationalism can be described as the “normal” activities of international migrants such as sending remittances, gifts, correspondence (email or any form of social messaging), telephone contact, political activity, as well as various forms of care and emotional networking. Schiller, Basch, and Blanc (1992) claim that through transnational activities, migrants become “transmigrants” that are able to build, maintain and reinforce multiple linkages with their countries of origin. Meanwhile, Zirh (2005) stresses that transnationalism does not merely focus on political and international relations, but it considers the reality facing certain groups of people especially those that are disadvantaged and marginalized.

Study of transnationalism carries various themes such as ethnicity and identity, gender, family, religion, remittances, entrepreneurship and political participation (Vertovec, 2004). Vertovec (2004) further argues that patterns of transnational activities are vary, influenced significantly by family and kinship structures, conditions in places of migrant origin and reception, transportation and smuggling routes, communication and media networks, financial

structures and remittance facilities, legislative frameworks regarding movement and status, and the economic interlinkage of local economies. It should be noted that these factors are determined by different kind of people on the move (or immigrants), and the motives behind their migration.

In relation to “activities of transnationalism” as mentioned earlier, Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) stress that a set of conditions are needed to be met for an activity to be considered transnational. These include new types of linkage or movement (email and social network); “massness” of the activity (scale of movement), frequency and continuity – which together make the activity a routine and normative. Al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2001) also suggest that transnationalism activities may also be divided into four forms – economic (i.e., financial remittances), political (i.e., human rights violation, vulnerability and marginalization, political instability and political affiliation), social (i.e., social contacts and membership of social network) and cultural (i.e., language, education, and community engagement). The findings of this study are expected to contribute in the first aspect of transnationalism, namely the “activities” of transnationalism.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study used ethnographic methods, combining three techniques of data collection, namely a survey, an in-depth interview, and a focus group discussion. The use of ethnographic methods has enabled us to understand the socio-cultural contexts, processes and meanings in relation to the Rohingyas’ onward movement from Bangladesh to Malaysia. It also assisted us to better understand their perception and discover the realities they face. The three combined methods also helped us to crosscheck information between respondents and key informants, as well as between quantitative (descriptive) and qualitative data.

We used the three ethnographic methods in two series of field works conducted in 2013 and 2016. The first series of fieldwork was conducted between 2 January 2013 and 30 April 2013, engaging Rohingya asylum seekers and refugees residing in Klang valley. A total of 48 Rohingya respondents were surveyed during this period. The study used the purposive sampling technique to determine Rohingya respondents through the help of Rohingya community leaders and activists.

The second phase of the fieldwork was undertaken between June and August 2016. Seven in-depth interview sessions and one focus group discussion with 12 key informants among the Rohingya community leaders and activists in Klang valley – were conducted

between June and August 2016. For security reasons and to prevent any unintended consequences, the personal details of the respondents have been kept confidential. It is important to note that the findings in this study do not represent the overall situation of the onward movement of Rohingya refugees from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh to Malaysia.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the total 48 Rohingya respondents, who were surveyed for this study, about 36 (75%) went to Bangladesh (specifically in Cox's Bazar) as the first asylum country, before continuing their journey to Malaysia. Another 12 (25%) migrated to Malaysia without using Bangladesh as a transit country – in two routes of migration: (a) migrating from the Arakan State of Myanmar, and transiting in Thailand before continuing their journey to Malaysia; and (b) migrating straightaway from the Arakan State of Myanmar to Malaysia.

The findings presented in this section only refer to Rohingya respondents (36 out of 48 Rohingya respondents) who have used Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar) as the first asylum country before migrating to Malaysia. Within this group of respondents, about 81% of them are male, and another 19% are female. Only one respondent claimed to be in the below 18-year-old age category. The majority (92%) have the history of settling temporarily at Kutupalong refugee camp while another 8% have settled temporarily at the Thangkhali refugee camp – both of which are among the most populated refugee sites in Cox's Bazar.

Factors in this section are divided into two components. Firstly, the factors that pushed the Rohingyas to leave their respective refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh in order to seek protection in another transit country. These push factors can be both voluntary and non-voluntary. Secondly, the factors that pulled or attracted the Rohingyas to seek refugee protection in Malaysia.

4.1 Push Factors

Generally, when asked about the reasons that had influenced them to leave Bangladesh, most of them provided more than one reason. This illustrates the diversity of factors, which may have collectively triggered the Rohingyas to make the difficult decision to leave their respective refugee camps, in search of international protection in other transit countries – in this case, Malaysia.

The vast majority of the Rohingya respondents (92%) claimed that security concern was the key factor triggering them to leave their respective refugee camps in Bangladesh in

search of protection in Malaysia (refer to Table 1). Due to a high incidence of theft and intimidation by smugglers and Bangladeshi enforcement personnel – many Rohingyas felt insecure and unsafe to live in refugee camps. One key informant also cited that there had been several sexual harassment cases against women and girls in refugee camps (In-depth interview with key informant [1], 26 June 2016).

Table 1: Push factors

Push Factors	(n)	(%)
Physical security concern	33	92
Poverty, lack of job, and income-generating activity	31	86
High competition to access UNHCR protection	26	72
Lack of access to basic facilities	25	70
Lack of access to education facilities	18	50
Lack of freedom of movement	14	39
Lack of access to healthcare facilities	9	25

Source: Fieldwork, from 2 January 2013 to 30 April 2013, Klang Valley, Malaysia

About 86% of Rohingya respondents cited that poverty and unemployment forced them to leave Bangladesh in search of a decent employment opportunity in other transit countries, in particular Malaysia. A Rohingya community leader stressed that there were almost no job opportunities inside refugee camps particularly in informal refugee camps and makeshift settlements (In-depth interview with key informant [2], 3 August 2016). He further informed that there were jobs such as temporary teachers and humanitarian workers in government-recognized (formal) refugee camps run by many humanitarian aid agencies operating in Cox's Bazar. However, not all Rohingyas are capable of working as a teacher and humanitarian worker, as they need to have at least basic language proficiency (English). Some Rohingya key informants shared that there were job opportunities outside their refugee camps (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016). Nevertheless, not many Rohingyas dared to take the risk of travelling outside their refugee camps. In addition, poverty among the Rohingyas in many refugee camps in Cox's Bazar had created many social problems. This has been raised by one of the key informants, as follows:

Many children involve in street crimes, while girls forced to get married with someone they do not know. There are also boys involved in smuggling activities by helping Dalal (local term referred to as a smuggler) in spreading advertisement, preparing foods, boats and petrol before they start their journey to Thailand or Malaysia.

(In-depth interview with key informant [2], 12 July 2016).

Thirdly, about 72% respondents informed that intense competition among Rohingya asylum seekers to access UNHCR protection and humanitarian aid was among the reasons that had forced them to seek UNHCR protection in other countries. According to key informants, too many Rohingyas had sought refuge in Bangladesh causing overcrowding of refugee camps, and that they had to compete among themselves in order to obtain the protection of UNHCR (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016).

One Rohingya community leader cited that although some Rohingyas had lived in Bangladesh for more than five years, they were yet to be registered as refugees by the UNHCR (In-depth interview with key informant [3], 2 August 2016). Some of them were also unsure as to whether their application has been accepted, or rejected as there was no efficient channel of communication between the applicants and UNHCR officers on the ground. Equally important to highlight that our survey found none of the respondents was registered as refugee while settling temporarily in Bangladesh.

Next, about 70% of Rohingya respondents reported that the lack of access to basic facilities such as clean water, electricity, and proper housing were among the critical problems faced by Rohingyas in many refugee camps in Bangladesh. Some women and children had to walk as far as two kilometers to fetch clean water with limited light at night (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016). This also raised security concerns among Rohingya women and children. In many refugee camps, food supplies were always insufficient. Rohingyas had to scramble to care for themselves while children, women, and the elderly were often caught at a disadvantage when obtaining food supplies.

A Rohingya community leader cited that the temporary residence in many refugee camps in Bangladesh were worn out and inappropriate for human beings (In-depth interview with key informant [4], 2 August 2016). He further clarified as follows:

During raining season, Rohingyas face chronic latrines as there are no proper piping systems installed around the housing area. I see this as a failure of the Bangladeshi authorities and humanitarian aid agencies for not being able to provide adequate and basic human necessities. Consequently, more and more Rohingyas including women and children forced to find a way out, including seeking help from smugglers to bring them to other transit countries.

According to half of the Rohingya respondents (50%), educational needs was also an important factor when they decided to move to another transit country. Many Rohingya key informants stated that education opportunity for their children was lacking in many refugee camps in Bangladesh including in formal refugee camps (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016). There were religious schools (*madrasah*) and NGO-run learning centers operating within refugee camps but these often were running on full capacity, as the number of children arriving in many refugee camps in Bangladesh grew over the years. Some of them informed that the lack of educational capacity such as untrained teachers, inadequate teaching materials, and lack of accreditation as well as administration oversight had been the key reasons for poor quality in alternative education provided to Rohingya children in refugee camps.

Slightly more than one-third (39%) of Rohingya respondents reported that the lack of freedom to move had encouraged them to leave their refugee camps in Bangladesh. The difficulty to move outside the camps or to cities within the district of Cox's Bazar had created various obstacles including seeking employment outside their respective refugee camps. A Rohingya community leader stressed that moving from one camp to another was an important aspect of their life, especially to find and reunite with their family members that had been separated during the migration period from Myanmar to Bangladesh (In-depth interview with key informant [2], 3 August 2016). Many children in refugee camps had been separated from their families, and were possibly orphaned. Hence, restriction in movement imposed by the Bangladeshi authorities had prevented them to reunite with their families in the country.

Lastly, about one-fourth of Rohingya respondents (25%) confirmed that the lack of access to healthcare facilities was an equally important reason to leave Bangladesh. Many Rohingyas had gone through traumatic experiences back home, which included continuous persecution, physical assault, and the killing of their relatives by the military-led Government of Myanmar for decades. Therefore, Rohingya refugees settling in refugee camps in

Bangladesh require more than regular health screening and immunization to prevent outbreaks of infectious diseases. Rohingyas also require continuous mental health treatment and psychosocial support. However, according to some key informants, many medical relief agencies in refugee camps only provided basic health screening including basic immunization for the sake of preventing outbreaks of many infectious diseases (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016).

4.2 Pull Factors

Despite the fact that the perception of Rohingyas settling in Malaysia was not necessarily correct, many Rohingya respondents still maintained a positive perception and high hopes to migrate to Malaysia for various reasons. This sub-section is an attempt to understand the narratives behind their perception to migrate-out from Bangladesh, and the realities they face in Malaysia.

The vast majority of Rohingya respondents (81%) reported that Malaysia had plenty of jobs and income-generating opportunities compared to other countries such as Thailand and Indonesia (refer to Table 2). Although Rohingyas are not legally permitted to enter the formal job market and operate their own business in Malaysia (Andika, 2017), the reality is that they are still employed, and ran their own small-sized businesses in many informal economic sectors such as trading, food service, and recycling.

However, some key informants expressed regret, and acknowledged the difficulty in finding a job in Malaysia. For instance, a Rohingya activist during in-depth interview session narrated the following:

Many Rohingyas in Bangladesh were informed that their relatives can easily get a job in Malaysia. Once they have the job, they will send money to their relatives in Bangladesh and Myanmar. That's why many Rohingyas in Bangladesh are excited to come to Malaysia, and these people willing to take the risk to be smuggled to Malaysia. However, in reality, not all Rohingyas were so lucky to get a job. Some of them had to wait like three to five years then they found it. Even that, their salary is cheap, and they do dangerous work such as working in construction site.

(In-depth interview with key informant [6], 12 August 2016)

Table 2: Pull factors

Pull Factors	(N)	(%)
Malaysia has plenty of job opportunities and income-generating activities	29	81
Malaysia as an Islamic state	26	72
Malaysia is a caring and compassionate society	17	47
Family reunification	14	39
Easy access to UNHCR protection and prospects for resettlement	8	22
Presence of migration services into Malaysia	5	14

Source: Field work, from 2 January 2013 to 30 April 2013, Klang Valley, Malaysia

Secondly, more than half of the Rohingya respondents (72%) reported that Malaysia was seen as a progressive Islamic country. This had attracted them to migrate to Malaysia. This factor, when coupled with job prospect and income generating opportunity, made a huge difference in deciding to move to Malaysia as compared to migrating to Indonesia or Thailand.

In addition to being perceived as a progressive Islamic nation, nearly half of the respondents (47%) reported that Malaysia was also perceived as a caring and compassionate society. Some key informants raised that the Rohingyas in Bangladesh had heard rumors about the Malaysian people, who were reportedly generous and sympathetic to the plight of the Rohingyas in Myanmar and Bangladesh (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016). However, some of them highlighted that there were several cases where the Rohingyas in Malaysia had been exploited and intimidated by individuals and enforcement personnel for many reasons.

Next, about 39% of the Rohingya respondents stated family reunification as another important factor that had encouraged them to move onward to Malaysia. The key informants highlighted that their relatives were forced to leave Arakan years ago and had now been settling in Malaysia for many years (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016). Therefore, it was time for them to live together and help each other in Malaysia.

About 22% of Rohingya respondents informed that they had decided to move to Malaysia because they presumed that it was easy to access UNHCR protection in Kuala Lumpur. Unlike Malaysia, the limited capacity of UNHCR in responding and providing

immediate humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh had rendered them unable to obtain adequate protection, let alone having the opportunity to be resettled to a third country. Nevertheless, a Rohingya key informant contested the argument that it is relatively easy to get a UNHCR protection in Malaysia as compared to in Bangladesh, as follows:

In Malaysia, you can find thousands of vulnerable Rohingyas who still do not have their UNHCR card. They have been in Malaysia for as long as three years but still “kosong” (unregistered). Some of them walked-in to UNHCR office to apply their refugee status, some other Rohingyas faxed their application forms and followed-up by calling the UNHCR office. But some of these people never had the opportunity to be interviewed by the UNHCR officials. How many years they need to wait?

(In-depth interview with key informant [7], 22 July 2016).

About 14% of Rohingya respondents stressed that many smugglers in Bangladesh provided smuggling services from Bangladesh to Malaysia. The smugglers offered various smuggling packages, some offering flexible repayment of smuggling fees while others offered job opportunities for the Rohingyas upon arrival in Malaysia (Focus group discussion with Rohingya community leaders and activists, 28 July 2016). Some smuggling services did not require Rohingya victims to transit in Thailand, rather, migrating in a single route (direct) from Bangladesh to Malaysia, with relatively less risk of being arrested by the Thai enforcement agencies. According to key informants during focus group discussion, the availability of such smuggling services has attracted many Rohingyas, who are desperate to leave refugee camps in Bangladesh, and to finally make a decision to move onward to Malaysia.

We argue that factors influencing the Rohingyas onward movement are multifaceted and institutionalized. Take for example of poverty and lack of job opportunities – they are significantly contributed by the prohibition of movement of Rohingyas outside their refugee camps by the Bangladesh authorities, and the lack of income-generating activities and humanitarian assistance offered by humanitarian agencies. Another example, the widespread use of smuggling service among Rohingya refugees suggests that the actors of transnationalism such as people smugglers and their sub-ordinates play very significant role in facilitating Rohingyas' cross-border movement from Bangladesh to Malaysia. These factors collectively

prompted many Rohingyas to embark on transnational movement from Bangladesh to Malaysia.

We also conclude that despite Rohingyas' perception toward Malaysia is not necessarily correct or real, this has been among the important factors that prompted many Rohingyas to move onward to Malaysia. On this particular note, we emphasize that socio-cultural context within the Rohingya community and the way they communicate and socialize to each other is of utmost importance to better understand the logic of the Rohingyas' decision to move onward. In addition, day-to-day realities they face in many refugee camps in Bangladesh tend to inspire them to fully believe what they have been told about Malaysia is going to be the potential solution of their adversity and futility in Bangladesh.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study found that while some Rohingyas have decided to migrate-out from Bangladesh for justifiable reasons (e.g., to look for job opportunities), other Rohingyas have decided to migrate because it is no longer conducive and safe for them to stay in overcrowded refugee camps situated in Cox's Bazar. This study also revealed that the availability of job opportunities, coupled with Malaysia's image as a progressive Islamic country – are important pull factors, attracting the Rohingyas to move onward to Malaysia, as compared to other transit countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. Findings in this study are also consistent with the earlier arguments put forward by Portes et al. (1999), Al-Ali et al. (2001), and Dunn (2005) that today's migration is complex both in scale and activities of transnationalism. Such complexity can also be linked with the rise of cross-border crimes, exploitation and violations of fundamental freedoms such as freedom of movement – all of which were highlighted by Rohingya key informants.

By referring to the case of Rohingyas' onward movement from Bangladesh to Malaysia, we conclude that transnational study should not be confined within the traditional themes such as family and kinship structures, assimilation and diaspora, social network, identity and remittance facilities. As the onward movement of the Rohingyas cuts across different aspects of their life, a study of transnationalism should rather capture both the perception and the realities they face – and that should include their enjoyment of human rights, freedom from slavery and human exploitation, and protection from the host governments, UN agencies as well as international humanitarian organizations.

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